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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a committee report of the last National School Bus Conference on "Minimum Standards for School Buses." Standards for school bus operations are included for (1) administrators, (2) supervisors, (3) school bus drivers, (4) student passengers, and (5) maintenance and service personnel. The report deals also with procedures for and evaluation of pupil transportation operations. The legal implications of students' safety and health while passengers on school buses are discussed. (Author/MLF)

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BUS OPERATIONS FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

"Chrome-Yellow and Red Lights"

PRESENTATION MADE AT THE 103D ANNUAL AASA CONVENTION

BEFORE MEMBERS OF SCHOOL OFFICIALS OF AASA

FEBRUARY 20-24, 1971 . . . ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

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CHROME-YELLOW AND RED LIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

A requirement of every vehicle being constructed as a school bus in the United States today is chrome-yellow and red lights. The purpose of chrome-yellow is to create recognition on the part of the motoring public. The purpose of red lights is to bring all traffic in the immediate vicinity of the bus to a halt, when children are being loaded or unloaded from the bus.

The focal point in evaluating the transportation program must be the passenger. Whether it be the construction of the bus or the operational procedures; the one question which must always be asked is: "Is this in the best interest of the passengers?"

In 1966, the United States Congress enacted two laws---The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, and the Highway Safety Act. The United States Department of Transportation is responsible for administrating these two laws. The first Act deals with the construction of the vehicle, while the second deals with the operational aspects and the associated factors, such as highway construction, the training of drivers, etc.

Since 1939, on eight different occasions, State and local officials together with representatives from industry, government, and national organizations came together voluntarily to develop improvements in matters of vital importance to the nation's school transportation service.

These sessions are referred to as the National Conference on School Transportation; the last one to be held was in May of 1970.

The first conference established minimum standards for school buses. On each of the following occasions, these standards were revised and up-dated to utilize the latest technology in vehicle construction.

At each of the eight conferences, related areas to the pupil transportation field were given consideration, such as selection and training of school bus drivers, the school bus stop law, guidelines for school bus bidding, school bus specifications, guidelines for RR crossings, school bus routing and school bus passenger behavior.

In preparation for the last conference, a committee was appointed to give consideration to standards for school bus operations. Most of my comments will be related to these standards.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Florida Statutes, Chapter 234, Section 234.02 reads as follows: "Safety and health of pupils. — Maximum regard for safety and adequate protection of health shall be primary requirements which must be observed by county boards of routing buses, appointing drivers, and providing and operating equipment."

The General Assembly of the State of Delaware recently enacted legislation clarifying the State Board of Education's responsibility for Pupil Transportation. Excerpts from Section 2707 Title 21 Delaware Code state:

> The applicant (school bus driver) shall have completed a course of at least eight hours duration of special instruction in school bus driving, conducted by the State Board of Education, which shall include at least the following subjects of instruction: School bus accident problems; Defensive driving, physical, mental and emotional aspects of school bus driving; State traffic laws and Motor Vehicle Department rules and regulations, emergency assistance and first aid; School bus care and maintenance; Child behavior and discipline.

In states where such statutes do not exist, the courts are clarifying the responsibilities of boards of education and of staff toward pupil trans-

portation. The Superior Court in New Jersey* held that the possible distinction based on independent contractor status and the board's non-ownership of the bus is not fairly tenable in view of the board's assumption of control with respect to matters of safety of the children while on the buses. The decision implies that a jury could have concluded that an assumption of responsibility for the safety of children on buses by the board's representatives was inadequately implemented by reasonably effective methods of supervision of children with potentially dangerous habits. Thus, the lower court judgment on a charge of negligence was reversed and a new trial ordered as to the libability of the board. Such developments, along with the impact of increasong traffic with its attendant hazards, should be considered in school bus operations.

SCHOOL SYSTEM RESPONSIBILITY

If school systems are to exercise the kind of responsibility implied here, they must take direct responsibility for adequate supervision of the following:

1. School bus construction specifications and maintenance
2. School bus drivers' physical condition, mental attitudes and appropriate training
3. Channels of direct communications between bus drivers and school administrators
4. Action to reduce hazards at ground level railroad crossings
5. Planning for loading and unloading of children
6. Orientation and education of school bus passengers
7. Planning for school bus routing
8. Funding

*Eastern School Law Review, Stephen F. Roach, Ph. D., ed. XV No. 140 Needham, Massachusetts, October 1967.

In view of this, the board of education and staff have a comparable responsibility for the safety of the pupil on the school bus to their responsibility for the safety of the pupil on the school ground or in the classroom.

The planned program for pupils should begin when the child steps on the school bus or school ground and continue until he leaves the school ground or school bus.

The following are my comments which are based on the committee report of the last National School Bus Conference on "Minimum Standards For School Buses." This report was completed in the fall of 1970 and presented by me as a speech at the 1970 National Safety Congress and Exposition, Chicago, Illinois.

SCHOOL BUS OPERATIONS

A successful pupil transportation operation depends upon a high quality of performance by all those who are associated with the program in any way. Standards for school bus operations include: 1) administrators, 2) supervisors, 3) school bus drivers, 4) student passengers, and 5) maintenance and service personnel. The sixth and seventh categories of the report deal with procedures and evaluation of the pupil transportation operations.

The introduction to the report states in part, "As school transportation expands its operations and as the driving environment becomes evermore complex the challenge to school administrators is to establish and maintain increasingly high standards of performance for all elements of the school transportation system."

I. ROLE OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATOR

The first item to be considered is the role of the administrator at the state level. The report lists eleven tasks or functions as belonging to the chief state school officer, who is usually the state superintendent of schools. I am going to mention just five of them here:

1) Appoint the State Supervisor of Transportation, with adequate staff to do the job.
2) Support the development of a handbook for the use of local transportation supervisors and local administrators.
3) Encourage institutions of higher learning throughout the state to provide both undergraduate and graduate level courses in pupil transportation.
4) Support the development of a manual for school bus drivers --- definitive enough to serve as a textbook during preservice and inservice instruction.
5) Support the development of a handbook or manual for maintenance personnel employed in a facility operated by the local school system.

I really believed that those of us dealing in pupil transportation should demand that the State make available this kind of direction. This will certainly bring us more and more into focus with the job to be done.

Now let us look at the administrator at the local level. I am not talking about transportation people, but about the superintendent and also his administrative staff. Certainly the principals are included in local administration. First, the administrator should become more involved in the pupil transportation operations within his jurisdiction. Involvement should include participation in training programs for transportation supervisors, school bus drivers and maintenance and service personnel. He

should be involved in actual observation of school bus routes, drivers, loading and unloading zones. This would best be accomplished by riding buses. He should participate in the investigation of accidents and other transportation malfunctions. He should also participate in the evaluation of pupil transportation operations.

Other tasks for the local administrator should be to encourage classroom teachers to become interested in transportation operations. He should provide resource materials and encourage teachers (particularly in the elementary grades) to include some instruction in passenger safety in the curriculum. He should further provide for close and continuous supervision of the loading and unloading zones on or near the school plant and should take part in the conducting of emergency drills.

II. PUPIL TRANSPORTATION SUPERVISOR

The second area to be given consideration in the report is the function of the pupil transportation supervisor. The committee dealt a little with job descriptions and talked first about the state transportation supervisor who acts in a special staff capacity to the chief state school officer. He utilizes the staff of the State Department of Education to help manage the state pupil transportation system including planning and budgeting for operations and improvements. He utilizes instructional personnel in the Department to transmit curricula activities back into the local school system. He pushes to see that the three previously mentioned manuals (one for the supervisor, one for the driver and one for maintenance personnel) are developed and published.

The report turns attention to the local pupil transportation supervisor. In contrast to his state counterpart, he should be primarily concerned with assisting the local administrators in implementing state pupil transportation

policies. Here it throws the onus on the state to establish policies and the local transportation supervisor should see that his administrator is complying with them.

Some of the duties of the local transportation supervisor include such items as school site selection and planning. I don't know how many transportation people actually participate in this kind of activity. I do know, however, when this does occur there is a considerable improvement in the kind of movement we have in the vicinity of the schools --- a reduction in lost motion that results from mislocation of a school. If the transportation supervisor is doing his job he knows where the children live. By following building trends, he can determine pupil impact and needs for transportation to new schools.

He is also responsible for recruiting, selecting, instructing and supervising drivers and other local transportation personnel. He should guide the development and implementation of instructional programs for school administrators, teachers and students. (I think that you are going to note all the way through that if these standards are to be carried out you must have administrators, teachers, contractors and other personnel pulled into the picture). Another function of paramount importance is that the local supervisor effectively investigates school bus accidents, road failures and other problems associated with the pupil transportation operations.

What should be the qualifications for these supervisors? Any individual functioning as a supervisor in this vital area should have a thorough understanding of the educational process and the role of pupil transportation in this process. Previous experience as a teacher or school administrator is desired. The ability to manage people and resources to achieve a needed objective is a must. I believe you are all aware that if

you are dealing with drivers, students and school officials that one of the most helpful characteristics you can have is your ability to relate to the human aspect of those people with whom you come into contact. Despite the nature and extent of his experiential background, the pupil transportation supervisor should receive formal instruction in pupil transportation management. This training should include classwork as well as field experience.

III. SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS

So much for the supervisor. Let's talk a little about the drivers, which is the third thing that we had to consider. We discussed the job description of the school bus driver, but I am going to omit the things that are obvious to us. Generally, the job description for the driver will vary to some extent from state to state and occasionally within a single state. However, there are certain duties that all school bus drivers are required to perform, such as establishing and maintaining rapport with the passengers. One of the comments that I frequently make to new drivers is that more of them will leave their positions because of inability to respond to passengers than because of their inability to handle the equipment. The driver should be a person who can meet an emergency based on standing operating procedures. He, or she, should be able to communicate effectively with the school staff.

Some of the procedures frequently used when selecting school bus drivers include such things as the checking of the applicant's driving record. I want to mention this because this area is expanding considerably with the widespread use of data retrieval equipment, and I hope that we are all using it. A check of the National Driver Register and the files of the state's motor vehicle department is to be considered essential in employing school bus drivers. The purpose of the National Driver Register is to

provide a central driving record identification facility containing the names of all drivers whose licenses have been denied, suspended, or revoked --- other than those whose licenses have been withdrawn for less than six months for a non-moving violation. The registry was established by the Congress of the United States to assist each state in locating the records that are available on these drivers. A check with the state motor vehicle department will reveal any involvement in highway accidents or moving violations in which the applicant has been involved, not necessarily only those resulting in suspension or withdrawal of his license.

A check to determine if the applicant has a record of criminal offense can be made by obtaining fingerprints and forwarding them to the state police with a request that they check for criminal offenses. I don't think anyone can justify placing a driver in a bus with children until these clearances have been made.

School bus drivers should be evaluated at regular intervals. This can be done by administering written tests, by observing the driver in a road performance check, by riding with him to see how he performs on the job, by trailing the bus frequently, by reviewing reports of complaints, by commendation of passengers, teachers, school officials and others. I suggest that each driver have a folder on file, and that when something in any of these areas is brought to your attention, an action report be inserted in the folder.

IV. STUDENT -- PASSENGERS

The fourth consideration of the report concerns the student-passenger. A program of instruction for the student-passenger should be developed cooperatively by school administrators, pupil transportation supervisors, curricula specialists, teachers, parents, and students. Parent-Teacher

Associations and organizations such as the National Safety Council can provide information on suggested content for this instructional program. The information presented and the way in which it is presented will vary according to the grade level of the pupils involved. Following are some examples of content which should be inserted:

...safe pedestrian practices on the way to and from school bus stops, including the desirability of wearing something light in color or preferably an item of reflective quality during those seasons when it is dark walking to and from the bus.

...how and where to wait for the bus at the stop. What to do if the bus does not arrive.

...when and how to use the emergency exit. (specific instructions should be given at least twice a year).

...what to do in the event of an accident, road failure or other mishap.

What about student management? Student management has as its objective the achieving of desirable behavior on the part of all students using the school law. The school bus has been referred to as a classroom on wheels -- an extension of the regular classroom. The school day begins when the pupil enters the bus and the school day ends as he leaves the bus. I belive that this was placed in the report because responsibility is many times questioned, particularly by principals. There are quite clear-cut decisions made by courts and in some cases, state laws that the board of education is responsible for the safety of the children during the time that he is a passenger on the bus. The prime responsibility for the pupil's conduct rests with the administrator of the school in which he is enrolled.

The school bus driver is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of each passenger while the bus is in transit --- meaning that he is responsible to the administrator of the school which the child attends.

Thus the driver has the same type of responsibility as the classroom teacher, and since the driver is liable for negligence, he should be permitted to recommend those actions which will result in improved safety for himself, the vehicle, the passengers and other highway users. It is important that these concepts be communicated effectively to school administrators, to parents and to student passengers. School systems should promulgate, communicate and enforce procedures to be followed by the students when riding on the bus.

V. MAINTENANCE AND SERVICE PERSONNEL

Now a little bit about maintenance and service personnel which is number five in the large areas of consideration of the report. The staffing of fleet operation garages varies widely. However, a staffing pattern frequently used is one full-time mechanic for every ten buses. This man must be capable of all necessary repairs in luding major overhauls. For each additional ten buses, one assistant mechanic capable of assisting with repair work should be hired. He could take full responsibility for lubrication, tire repairs, washing the vehicles and like tasks. In a garage with a staff of two or more, the assignment of mechanics and helpers will normally be a function of the head mechanic or the local pupil transportation supervisor.

The school system should develop and make available the required maintenance and service publications for the equipment being serv ced. The school system should arrange for preservice and inservice training at regular intervals. They should encourage and even require maintenance personnel to attend training programs sponsored by the state or perhaps by manufacturers of the specific equipment which the mechanics are maintaining.

Some of the material included in these training programs should include such things as servicing procedures for the equipment, preventive maintenance, keeping maintenance records for each piece of equipment and forcasting and ordering supplies, parts and other needed items.

VI. PROCEDURES

We are now discussing the area of procedures. What should be considered under procedures? Under this, the sixth category of the committee report, appears the word "policy." The report states, "Both the State Department of Education and the local school system should have a clear-cut, concise, unambiguous policy concerning who is eligible for transportation on school buses owned or contracted for by the State or the local school systems, and the conditions under which these students will be transported."

Some of the subjects which should be treated in this policy document include procurement of equipment and supplies, maintenance, and inspection, and the period over which the equipment will be depreciated. Procedures should be specific on driver recruitment, selection, instruction, placement and supervision; also specific on contractor recruitment, instruction, payment and supervision. The policy procedure should include effective principles of routing, establishing shcool bus stops and schedules. Pupil transportation supervisors are encouraged to utilize the services of the state and local police and the traffic engineering departments of state and local road agencies when planning school bus routes. Each school should have a loading and unloading area with all other traffic prohibited.

In addition to being the heart of an effective maintenance program, inspection is one of the greatest safety factors in pupil transportation.

Definite policies and procedures should be set forth regarding inspection, making sure that it is not passed over in a superficial manner as often happens.

Under procedures record keeping is essential. We need records on accidents, personnel records, maintenance records and cost records. Emergency procedures must certainly be included. Each local unit should have a pre-emergency plan carefully developed by the combined efforts of the pupil transportation supervisor, school administrators, teachers, drivers and students. Some contingencies which should be planned for are obviously accidents, road failures and inclement weather conditions. Others might include civil defense drills and strikes by drivers, contractors and others. Procedures would necessarily include communications. The school system must insure that information concerning the transportation system and service can be rapidly disseminated to everyone concerned. Some methods which might be used are conferences, circulars, telephones, radio, and even television.

VII. EVALUATION

The last item in the report deals with the evaluation of the transportation operations. This will really tell whether or not you are accomplishing the goals you have established. Without a system of evaluation, you will never know. Several criteria can be applied to obtain some estimates of the operations' effectiveness --- relating to such factors as safety, efficiency and economy. Safety criteria could also include frequency and severity of property damaging accidents, injuries to bus passengers and other highway users. Frequency and nature of complaints from parents, passengers and others would be considered here. The frequency and nature of road failures and other emergency situations involving buses should indicate something to you.

If you are going to look for efficiency check for the frequency with which trips were completed on schedule, the numbers of vehicles used to transport a given number of students, the numbers and lengths of the routes and the amount of time the students have to wait at school before classes actually begin --- all tell you something about efficiency.

For more information on the committee report, "Standards For School Bus Operations," send for the items listed in the bibliography. In the appendices of the report there will be specific guides which you can pull out and adapt to your specific situations. Some of these are school bus utilization, driver application, after-action reports on school bus driver observation, check lists for personnel interviews, evaluation forms for school bus driveways, a driving record sample and others.

The committee report should be used by people who are legally or in any way responsible for pupil transportation as minimum recommendations for getting the job safely and efficiently done.

SUMMARY

Pupil transportation plays a primary role in the educative process. Since over sixteen million boys and girls in the United States ride school buses each day, it seems imperative that the experiences encountered by the riders be given very careful consideration from the viewpoint of the educational values involved.

If the preceding statement is based on a sound premise, it seems that procedures for evaluating the pupil transportation program could be carefully scrutinized.

Administrative personnel need to be much better informed on the intricate structure of the transportation system. This may be accomplished in at least two ways. First, workshops could be organized to develop a

better understanding. Second, courses on pupil transportation could be offered for credit by the various higher educational institutions. It would be possible, then, to create an awareness on the part of the personnel responsible for developing the child's experiences through transportation of the potential for implementing the educative process.

The school bus operator should be prepared to cope with a program which will utilize these pupil experiences to the fullest extent. Selection and preparation of drivers to carry out their responsibilities should be thorough. This implies an understanding of the human growth and development of boys and girls and a knowledge as well as an understanding of the objectives and aims of the school which the driver of the school bus serves. Careful plans must be made to acquaint him with appropriate methods of working with parents and other citizens of the community.

True, this costs money. There are currently greater demands for additional funds for transportation. In light of this, it seems that as more funds are invested in pupil transportation, we should take every step to assure the greatest return. What better value can we receive for our money than the development of the kind of environment for children riding school buses that will assist them to grow up with behavior characteristics that will assure them every potential of success and happiness in their endeavors.

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